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ABSTRACT

This study examines the meaning of the concept of "principal support" from the point of view of seven teacher-librarians in two Alberta (Canada) school districts. It also explores the different ways in which these teacher-librarians went about increasing principal support for the school library program and for their role as teacher-librarians. The findings have been derived from the analysis of data collected for two studies involving aspects of teacher-librarian practice. The teacher-librarians indicated that the principal shows support for the program in three ways: (1) by working directly with teachers to develop their understanding of the program; (2) by clearly demonstrating personal commitment to the program; and (3) by using the management role of the school leader to enable the program. By working with the teachers, the principal makes it clear that teachers are expected to be involved in the school library program, both during the hiring process and on an ongoing basis. The principal encourages teachers' professional development in relation to the school library program by providing inservice and by providing time for the program in staff meetings. In his or her management and administrative role in the school, the principal supports the program by ensuring the provision of adequate budgeting for materials and for clerical help. Principal support for the teacher-librarian is also shown by providing teacher-librarians with an element of visibility and importance. (AEF)

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Principal Support: What Does it Mean to Teacher-Librarians?

by
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"The principal's support of the library as a vital part of the educational system is extremely important." Winifred B. Linderman wrote in an article entitled, "What Should the School Librarian Expect of the School Principal?" in the December 1944 issue of *The School Review* (p.614). This quote from fifty years ago could easily have come from a much more recent source. The School library lit-erature from its earliest years contains discussions of the rle of the principal in school library programs, often centering around the notion of principa support. Research shows that, althou teacher-librarians generally view principal support as critical to the success of the library program (Haycock,1992) , they often have low expectations of principal support (Lewis, 1991; Campbell, 1991) and rarely engage in the kind of activities that would increase their principals' understanding and support (Edwards, 1989).

This study examines the meaning of the concept of "principal support" from the point of view of seven teacher-librrians in two Alberta school districts. It also explores the different ways in which these teacher-librarians went about increasing principal support for the school library program and for their role as teacher-librarians. The findings have been derived from the analysis of data collected for two studies involving aspects of teacher-librarian practice, earlier reported at IASL conferences.

The paper begins with a brief review of relevant professional and research literature and a discussion of the research methodology. Several of the themes from the findings are then explored. Implications for the educaiton of teacher-librarians and for further research conclude the paper.

Principal Support in the Professional and Research Literature

As the summary chart below (Table 1) suggests over the past twenty-five years there have been frequent references in the professional literature of school librarianship to the concept of principalsupport but there are fewer references in the research literature. Shields (1977) and Charter (1982) found that principa support was critical to the development of school libraray programs. Dekker (1989) found that shcool district administrators were also important in enabling principals to support library programs in their schools. Corr (1979) and Turner (1987) found that principal attitude was positively correlated to program implementation. Hellene (1973) and Yetter (1994) found that principal support for the school library program involves such things as encouragimg ots ise bu teacjers amd stidemts, integrating the program into the curricular work of the shcol, and providing flexible scheduling. Wilson, Blake and Lyders (1993) found that many principals were hamered in their support for school librries by lack of knowledge about the management and function of school libraries.

Methodology

This study of principal support has been carried out by "researching" the data collected for two earlier studies. As is often the case with research of a qualitative nature, the data was richer than could be addressed in the reports of findings directly related to the research questions proposed for the two studies. The purpose of all three studies has been to understand more deeply aspects of school library practice, not to derive generalizable findings, at least not in the quantitative reserach sense of generalizable findings. Instead my purpose as a researcher has been to devleop an understanding of one aspect of school library practice, for myself as an educator and for the participants as practioners. Others who wish to explore those insights and to apply them to their own practce as teacher-librrians or as teacher-librarian educators must do so with an awareness of the unique contexts in which this research was careied out and keeping inmind the similarities and differences between their contexts and contexts of these studies.

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Support for the School Library Program	Professional Literature	Research Literature
Working directly with teachers • expectations • professional development	Austram et al., 1989; Baker, 1980; Carson, 1989; Davies, 1979; Fox, 1982; Loertscher, 1988; Lundin, 1983; Podemski 1990; Yesner & Jay, 1987	Charter 1982; Hellene, 1974
Demonstrated personal commitment • explicit valuing of program • using program in own teaching • visible in library	Carson, 1987; Davies, 1979; Fox, 1982; Grant, 1988; Kuehn, 1975; Loertscher, 1988; Lundin, 1983; Morris, Gillespie & Spirt, 1992; Prostano & Prostano, 1987; Yesner & Jay, 1987.	
Enableing the program • materials/clerical staff budget • flexible scheduling • includes program as an integral part of school's curriculum work (planning, evaluating)	Austrom et al., 1989; Baker, 1982; Browne & Burton, 1989; Carson, 1987; Davies, 1979; Fox, 1982; Hamilton, 1983; Kuehn, 1975; Loertscher, 1988; Lundin, 1983; Morris, Gillespie & Spirt, 1992; Podemski, 1990; Prostano & Prostano, 1987; Yesner & Jay, 1987	Charter, 1982; Dekker, 1989; Hellene, 1974; Shields, 1977; Turner, 1987; Wilson, Blake, & Lyders, 1983; Yetter, 1994
Support for the Teacher-Librarian	**Professional Literature**	**Research Literature**
Providing visibility/importance • makes time for meetings with TL • trusts TL's knowledge and expertise • encourages TL's personal and professional development	Baker, 1982; Carson, 1987; Davies, 1979; Hamilton, 1983; Kuehn, 1975; Morris, Gillespie & Spirt, 1992; Yesner & Jay, 1987	

Table 1

The first study (LaRocque and Oberg, 1990) examined the role of the principal as one element of school culture that facilitated the successful establishment of school library programs. In a small urban school district rputed to have exemplary school library programs, the research team interviewed twelve individuals--at the district level, the superintendent and school library consultant,a dn at the school level, the teacher-librarian and the principal or vice-principal from five of the districts' schools. The interviews, about an hou each in length, wee audiotaped and transcribed. Over 300 pages of interview transcripts wer available for analysis. The transcripts wer analyzed using a content analysis approach. Five themes wer identified relating to the role of the principal in supports school lbirary programs: believeing in the school library program; recognizing the importance of the teacher-librarian; ensuring cooperative planning time; providing appropriate staff development; and monitoring implementation of the school library program.

The second study (Oberg, 1992) examined the experiences of two teacher-librarienas as they struggled to establish a library program in a chool where the program was new to them as well as to the teachers and the principals of their schools. The same research team as in the first study

interviewed the two teacher-librarians over a three-year period. The teacher-librarians were interviewed jointly three times in their first year of practice and then separately once yearly in the subsequent years. The seven interviews varied in length from over two hours to under an hour and resulted in about 150 pages of interview transcripts. Five themes wer identified related to learning to be a teacher-librarian: academic preparation; previous teaching experience; person experiences; consulting the experts, and first year experience as a teacher-librarian.

The notion of principal support emerged frequently as a major focus in the first study and as a frequent subtext in the second study. All of the origninal transcripts of interviews of the seven teacher-librarians, five interviews from the first study and seven interviews from the second, a total of 175 pages of transcript data, were reviewed to locate references to principal support and to construct from these references an understanding of what teacher-libarians did to obtain principal support. Because the two studies inolved teacherlibrrians from two different stages in their professional lives, it was possible also to compare their understandings and actions in relation to principal support. The five teacher-librarians in the first study, who are temed in this paper experienced teachr-librarians all had worked as teacher-librarians for more than ten years; the two teacher-librarians in the second study were just beginning their professional careers, novices in their first three years of practice.

Findings from the Data

The concept of principal support was understood by both novice and experienced teacher-librarians in terms of support for the school library program and support for the teacher-librarian.

Understindings of Principal Support for the School Library Program

The Teacher-librarians indicated that the principal shows support for the program in three ways: by working dirctly with teachers to develop their understanding of the program; by clearly demonstrating personal commitment to the program; and by using the management role of the school leader to enable the program.

In working with teachrs, the principal makes clear that teachers are expected to be involved in the shcool library program, both during the hiring process and on an ongoing basis. The principal also encourages teachers' professional development in relation to the school library program by providing inservice and by providing time for the program in staff meetings. The following quotes from the interview transcripts are examples of how the teacher-librarians saw this kinid of principal support.

> I've had all I wanted [from my principal in terms of setting future expectations, expectation for teachers... [My principal] incorporated into his interviews with teachers questions like, "How would you work with a teacher-librarian? Have you worked reviously with a teacher-librarian?" That immediately sets the expectation that if that person comes on staff, that's one of the things that they'll be expected to do... He was visibly behind the program, specifically by asking teachers to include in their long range plans how they were going to teach with me. And very visible, like there was, you know, no see-sawing about it. He really set the expectations for the staff that this was to happen. (B-Experienced TL)

> With the other teachers, [my principa] will just casually say, "Well, you could do that with [the teacher-librarian] you know." This will be in the staff room "You could work with [the teacher-librarian] on this, or maybe [the teache-librarian] know what to do with that." She will just mention these kinds of things to get me more involved with the staff. (F-Noveice TL)

> When it came time to inservice people on[the new library policy], there was no question that I got the half day and that every teacher would participate in the inservice including himself. (A-Experiecned TL)

The teacher-librarians stated that the principal demonstrates acive personal commitment for the school libarary program by making explicit statements about the value of the program, by being visible in the library, and by being a model for teachers by using the program in his or her

teaching. The principal interprets the role of the school library program to students and parents and to district level personnl and other principals. The following quotes are examples give by the teacher-librarians of their principal's active personal commitment to the school library program:

> [Our principal] decided she really wanted [teacher-librarians in her school]. She went to distreict administration and made a proposal... [She] wanted us there so much she was willing to make a proposal and go through all that just to have us in the school ... Because she felt that we could benefit them I think with a knowledge of research and a knowledge of literature ... She had the courage to hire us. (F-Noveice TL)

> [The vice-principal] and I had some wonderful units togehter last year, probably the best ones of the whole year and I did twenty-five units las year with teachers... [The principal] and I just finished a unit on Ancient Greece. .... [The principal] has made it kknown to [the dristrict libray consultant] that this shcool works and that one fo the aspects of this school's culture is the library program. (D-Experienced TL)

The principal, in his or her management and administrative role in the school, sjupports the school libaray poergram by ensuring the provision of adequate program budgeting for materials and for clerical help by arranging for the flexible scheduling that allows for cooperative planning time. The principal also ensures that the school library program is integrates into the planning and evaluating structures of the school. These quotes provide examples of how principals enable the school library program:

> [The principal] is very supportive first of all in giving me the time. I wa just flabbergasted when he came to me and said, last summer before we even started school. "I hear you have a good program but you had some constgraints last year." ... I was providing preps in the morning so therefor my cooperative planning was down to about one-third of my time. ... God knows how he does it, but he finds the time or the money to give the teachers preps through a part-time teacher who was hired in September which give me all flexible time. (D-Experienced TL)

> It's our principal who continues to mae this a successful program. ... Evey two monthe we [teachers] had a special form that we need to fill in and then it's followed by an oral interview with one of our administrators... It soays to highlight things you've done in each of your grades. Typically teachers are saying that one of the neat things they did is that they did a cooperative unit. ... In the timetables, we have what we call "Day Zeros" here. Every two weeks we have a half-day when students aaren't present and our calendar spells out exactly what happens on those days. It's cooperatvie planning in conjunction with department head meetings. (E-Experienced TL)

Understandings of Principal Support for the Teacher-Librarian

The principal shows support for the teacher-librarian in providing the teacher-librarian with an element of visibility and importance. The principal makes time for meetings with the teacher-librarian. The principal trusts the professional knowledge and expertixe of the teacher-librarian and gives consideration to her ideas and suggestions. The principal encourages the personal and professional development of the teacher-librarian.

> [My principal] said at one time to another principal in the foyer of the school, "Having [teacher-librarian] is great. I woudn't be without a teacher-librarian. (G-Novice TL)

> When questions came from [the superintendent] having teacher-librarians and clerks in the library, one or the other, [the principal's] opinion was that, well, she would have a teache-librarian, definitely. So, she sees the value of the teacher-librarian and I think I could go to her at anhy time for support and I wouldn't feel that I wasn't going to get it. (C-Experienced TL)

> [The principal] comes in and supports me personally by saying, "You know I like what you're doing. I like this and I love this library" She'll just walk in here and say, "I love this library, don't you?" ...She said, "We are so lucky to hav you." It made me feel so

good, so I think she appreciates the work I do. (F-Novice TL)

[The principal] supports me by including me on his department head agenda where we report on the units that are being done or in the works. ... And he also has a regularly scheduled meeting with me once a week to report on those units...we cover a log of gournd in those meetings, right down to cecility, and problems too. (E-Experienced TL0

A supportive principal would encourage me to go to different schools and seek more profeasional development, encourage that continually, provide funding for that so I see new ideas and see different things and it encourages me to try different things (G-Novice TL)

The novice and experienced teacher-librarians deomstrated similar understanding of the concept of principal support for the school library program and for the teacher-librarians; they differed, however, in their understandings of how theymight engender that support and in the actions to ensure ahta they had that support.

Actions Taken to Develop Prinicpal Support

Thrre has been over the past twentyh-five years a number of articles in the professional literature, directed to techer -librarians, suggesting how they might go about developing principal support, for the school library progrmand for their role as teacher-librarians (see, for example, Haycock, 1981; Miller & Spanjer, 1985). The novice teacher librarians, in the interviews held midway through their first year of practive, were aware of thenned to gain principal support but wer not actively seeking that suport:

We Really have to educate the principals ... You have to get your adminstration on side. (F-Novice TL)

I thnk [our principal] has an idea in her own mind that might not agree with what we thing [about what teachers-libararians should do] ... We would like to know how [she] perceives the library program and the role of the teacher-librarian. ... Idon't remember sitting down and saying, "We'd like to do this." with her. ... I think it was partlly making assumptions. I don't think we acutally sat down and clarified. (G-Novice TL)

In their second and third year of practive, the novice teacher-libararians wer no longer working toghether. One (G) remained in their first school and the other (F) removed to a new school that was just being opened in the district. During their second and third years of practive, the teacher-librarian in the nw school (G) continued to experience difficilties in gaining principal support byt the one who had remained in their first school (F) was beginning to more actively work to gain the principal's support, as the following quotes show:

[The principal] schould be aware of [the school libray program]. I tried to explain it to her. She was receptive, but I'm not sure she really understood it. (G-Novice TL)

I've been talking to [my principal] more about the way I think the library should go. Just in litle subtle ways ... Telling hew how the library shuld go ... Sometimes I go in on the weekends and I have really good talks with her. I just tell her what I'm doing and what I think is important ... I'm approaching her in a different way ... Communicating with her more just letting hew know and sometiems she doesn't agree with some of the things I'm suggesting, but if she suports it - and then she'll always listen to the other side of it too.....I have goals and some of these have been written down. They were written down at the beginning of the year because [the principal] always likes us to state our goals and I think that's an excellent idea. I told her some of them. I'm communicating with her very well, I feel, and I want to keep that up. (F-Novice TL)

The experienced teacher-librarians as a group wre much more direct in their communicatioins with their principals and more active in gaining the suport of their principals (although there were variations among the five). There was also an awareness that support from other administrators, such as vice-principals and district level administrators, was also important.

I asked [my principal] if I could do an inservice at once of our first staff meeting becaurw at our staff meetings we are allowed a certain amount of time for professional development. So I askid if I could do that at the September one, and I had a short inservice, an overview of cooperative planning and teaching. (C-Experienced TL)

When I'm having a cooperative planning unit with a teacher who is not quite as aware of the [library] program ... I'll tell [the principal], "I'm planning with so-and-so this week. Whydon't you drop inand see how we're doing?" So she drops in. That's the kind of support she gives. ... Subtle but realy important. (B-Experienced TL)

[Principal support] has got to be active support and it's got to be support that understands what the cooperative program is all about. Part of that is education. When we have a [new] vice-principal on staff, I make good and sure that they know how ... Cooperative planning works and I involve them in as many units as I can, because they're going to grow up to be principals. If they don't know how to run a library, if they don't know what's involved in a library program, chances are when theyget a school, they're not going to be any difference from what we've got already. And I make no bones about it. I always tell them that they're in training! (B-Experienced TL)

A lot of input on what the library program [in our school district] would be, cam from a group of us [teacher-librarians]. ...We had no policy and that disturbed me a lot ... We wrote our own policy and we just hapened to be writing it and getting it done at the right time. ... [The superintendent] went withthat policy and took it to the Board. ... in that policy are a lot of things that are necessary to establish a decent library program. (A-Expereienced TL)

The novice and experienced teacher-librarians were quite similar in their understandings of what principal support entailed, but they wer quite differenct in the ways in which they acted to ensure that support.